NOTES ON TIME IN THE MODERN BRITISH NOVEL (5)

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CHAPTER V

TIME IN RELATION TO TECHNIGUE AND STRUCTURE

Multiple Simultaneity

Though the purpose for which simple simultaneity is used differs in accordance with each novelist's particular temperament and vision of life, there is a definite progression in the invention of new ways and means of effecting the juxtaposition. The same applies to multiple simultaneity. From Conrad through Mrs. Woolf and Joyce, the devices of multiple simultaneity grow in number and complexity ; naturally, they fulfill in each author functions particular to his fictional estheic. Throughout all the variations of purpose and point of view, however, one element is common : the alignment of a past, sometimes future, event or sequence of events with the dramatic present. Thus, a frequently many-levelled action will be complicated by an additional strand.

In order to indicate more clearly the changes in the application of the devices of multiple simultaneity, I shall depart from my general practice and discuss separately each device as it appears in the four authors. The principal devices are these six : retrospective exposition, chronological looping, the time-shift, the motif, recapitulation, and recreation.

Mr. Mendilow has truly said that modern novelists are against the preliminary, or intercalated, exposition typical of most eighteenth and nineteenth century novels. Instead, they prefer the "distributed" exposition, by which the past and pre-past are interwoven "with the main line of the action in the form of short alternating or even intermingling retrospective and anticipatory flashes." Mr. Mendilow does not, however, deal with the multiple time series often produced by this device ; neither dies he distinguish between the use of distributed exposition and the more general method of chronological looping, which, he identifies with the time-shift technique. True enough, these various techniques are interrelated ; but they are distinctive enough to permit the literary analyst to deal with each in turn.

Conrad's methods of introducing expository material are many and various, ranging from the traditional techniques of the omniscient author to retrospection and dialogue. Even, however, when Conrad uses plain exposition, it is seldom in the form of a single intercalated passage. Where such seems to be the case, in Almayer's Folly—which has a fifty-page section setting up the background to the principal action—the use of a special device tends to align it with this action. In The Rescue, which contains an expository

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section of about equal length, the attempt to present it partly through the characters, like Lingard and Jaffir, does not produce the same result. The rudimentary looping device which Conrad employs in his début novel, on the other hand, seems fairly successful. At the end of the first scene Almayer sleeps, while his daughter Nina watches the raging storm : "undisturbed by the nightly event of the rainy monsoon, the father slept quietly, oblivious alike of his hopes, his misfortunes, his friends and his enemies ; and the daughter stood motionless, at each flash of lightning eagerly scanning the broad river with a steady and anxious gaze." (19-20) At the completion of the exposition. partly dramatized and in the last pages becoming extremely specific, the focus returns to Almayer and Nina on the same night."……that night Almayer slept soundly, while Nina watched the angry river under the lash of the thunderstorm sweeping onward towards the sea." (74) If Conrad had not so emphatically stated that Almayer "slept sounly," the entire section might have appeared as a dream elaboration. Of course, Conrad was right in not complicating the looping in this manner; its mere presence serves well enough to accommodate the exposition within the fictional time of the novel.

Short passages of plain distributed exposition are usually enclosed within discriminated occasions ; this is particularly so in Nostromo, a novel which because of its vast scope and numerous characters required an inordinate amount of expositioon. Typical of many instances is Conrad's interpolation of General Barrios' past within snatches of dialogue between him and the party seeing him off to the war.[1] The beginning of The Secret Agent offers an expository passage which is framed by a specific action. The first sentence runs : "Mr. Verloc, going out in the morning, left his shop nominally in charge of his brother-in-law." (17) Section Ⅱ resumes the specific action : "Such was the house, the household, and the business Mr. Verloc left behind him on his way westward at the hour of half-past ten in the morning." (23) The reader is free to assume that while the past of Verloc has been revealed to him, Mr. Verloc has been on his way to an appointment. The appearance of double-time is here perceptible enough.

In the preceding instances, no retrospection appears ; more frequently that not Conrad will make use of it, principally, however, as a means only of introducing the exposition. Exceptions to this practice appear where a narrator is present, as, for instance, in Lord Jim. Since the narrator, together with his assistants, has complete knowledge of the characters, including their pasts, he causes the entire story to be retrospective. But the Conradian narrator, at his best at least, is also an actor and can participate in scene and dialogue. The implication of this situation for exposition is evident in Lord Jim at the point where Marlow meets Stein. The entomologist is admiring his collection of butterflies. "Marvellous,' he whispered, and seemed to forget my presence." (205) Then Marlow gives a three-page survey of his "history," after which he reverts to Stein, still absorbed in his beloved collection. "'Marvellous,' he repeated, looking up at me." (207) The exposition itself is nothing unusual ; from beginning to end it differs not at all from the traditional kind. It is its context which is distinctive. Though Marlow, the retrospective narrator, does not show himself as looking back upon Stein's life at the time of the meeting, the reader is certainly free to imagine that the time of the exposition coincides with the period of Stein's absorption in his treasures.

Where no narrator is present, Conrad will use the characters themselves as vehicles

of introducing exposition. Often he makes merely a hint that retrospection is the source of the information, most of which appears in the form of generalized narrative or summary, with interspersed specific action and snatches, or passages, of dialogue. Nostromo provides the best examples of this procedure. Old Viola, for example, has a port rait of Garibaldi in his house ; before Conrad gives the history of the staunch revolution ary he shows him making a gesture with "his arm upward as if referring all his quick, fleeting thoughts to the picture of his old chief on the wall." (25-26) Victory contains a more elaborate instance of the same device. The important figure in Heyst's past was his father, on whose portrait and books he apparently puts a high value. Conrad does not make use of these objects in the first passages of exposition ; these begin in direct retrospection. But later he exploits Heyst's simple habit of reading his father's books as a means of amplifying and specifying the reader's knowledge of Heyst's past. And the portrait is always there, renewing the sense of the elder Heyst's personality.

> The son read, shrinking into himself, composing his face as if under the author's eye, with a vivid cinsciousness of the portrait on his right hand, a little above his head ; a wonderful presence in its heavy frame on the flimsy wall of mats, looking exiled and at home, out of place and masterful, in the painted immobility of profile. (206)

The use of the portrait and the books naturally goes far beyond purposes of exposition ; they become, indeed, symbols of the tenacious immanence of the past in Heyst's present.[2)]

Two other expository devices in Nostromo, however inconspicuous, are remarkable for their similarity to the strategies of strean-of-consciousness novelists. Mrs. Viola has a chronic ailment and suffers physical pain ; on the wave of this sensation, Conrad carries the reader back to the time when it first occurred. The process of thought is one of disciplined free association, appropriately expressed in erlebte rede. For instance, the sunshine of Costguana, which "was heavy and dull—heavy with pain—" (27) by contrast calls up the memory of the "sunshine of her girlhood, in which middle-aged Georgio had wooed her gravely and passionately on the shores of the gulf of Spezzia." (27-28) Though there is no mention of retrospection in this passage, some of the mechanisms of the process of thought are indubitably those of affective memory. Much simpler is another instance, involving a chain of reflections released by a simple visual impression. "Old Georgio contemplated his children thoughfully." (31)

Often Conrad will use more general vehicles of exposition. For example, he will suggest a character's "absorption in his memories" and on the stength of this bring his past into the dramatic present ; (N, 31) or he will make a character suggest the continuance of an unknown personal past through a hyperreactive emotionalism. At the apparent defeat of Decoud's political plan, Dr. Monygham splutters with fury at the mere mention of the young man. "The doctor flung up his arms, exclaiming, 'Decoud! Decoud! He hobbled about the room with slight angry laughs." (412) Then follows a six-page exposition which serves among other things to explain the doctor's strange behavior. Since Conrad could not show Dr. Monygham recalling the past on this particular occasion, he has contented himself with suggesting that the particular incident which the ex-

position reveals is as fresh as ever in the mind of the tortured victim. (413, 416) When, on reverting to the specific occasion, the reader again hears the doctor exclaiming "Decoud! Decoud! in a tone of mournful irritation," (419) it is with a fuller awareness of the past experiences which motivate Dr. Monygham's conduct.

Everyone who has read Conrad is familiar with his conscientious documentation of subject-matter and the meticulous care with which he will trace the elements in his stories to their original source. His handling of exposition is no exception, as the above analysis has shown. Even where the expository material far transcends the temporal scope of individual memories, as very often happens in Nostromo, Conrad will usually present it as filtered through the minds of specific characters. Where personal experience is inadequate, reading, rumor, and legend eke it out. This means only that Conrad's handling of exposition is no different from the way he forwards the narrative in this novel, which proceeds fairly continuously under the aegis of one or the other of the characters. For an obvious reason, Mrs. Gould is the most copious voucher for the historical facts presented in Nostromo. "Mrs. Gould knew the history of the San Tome mine"; (57) some of her knowledge is second-hand, having been conveyed to her by her husband, whose memory during the time when he was courting his future wife "was very full of the country of his childhood……" (71) But "the latest phase in the history of the mine Mrs. Gould knew from personal experience. It was in essence the history of her married life." (73) In order to secure the reader against forgetting that the the exposition is screened through an individual memory, Conrad recurs periodically to Mrs. Gould. (95) Other characters whose experience provides vouchers for the authenticity of Sulaco history, and thereby serves to make Conrad's fictional world self-contained, are Don José Avellanos, (149-58) and Don Pépé. (108-09) There is, besides, the anonymous source of social gossip, which, however, is far more effectively used in individual exposition. At two points, Dr. Monygham's past is the subject of "strange rumors." "Years ago, in the time of Guzman Bebto, he had mixed up, it was whispered, in a conspiracy which was cetrayed……" (49) The second time the incident is mentioned, the "vague whispers" are more sinister, hinting that "he had betrayed some ot his best friends among the conspirators." (346) It is only in the last distributed exposition relating to the doctor that all the relevant facts are revealed.

None of the instances exposition so far noted involves direct retrospection. Though Conrad will not use this device lavishly, he can turn it to good account. Technically, he never surpasses the skill with which he exploits it in his first novel, though he learned later how to use it more unobtrusively. The attention of Almayer, fixedly contemplating the river, becomes caught by a tree floating on the current. After he has lost sight of it, he wonders:

> Would the current carry it north or south? South, probably, till it drifted in sight of Celebes, as far as Macassar, perhaps!
> Macassar! Almayer's quickened fancy distanced the tree on its imaginary voyage, but his memory lagging behind some twenty years or more in point of time saw a young and slim Almayer, clad all in white and modest-looking, landing from the Dutch mail-boat on the dusty jetty of Macassar, coming to woo fortune in the go-downs of old Hudig. (4-5)

The exposition is mainly in the form of generalized narrative, with a few short scenes of dialogue interspersed. And then again Almayer is shown remembering—perhaps a bit too emphatically—the time of his youthful dreams. (11) To best advantage does Conrad use retrospection for the same purpose in Victory ; the temperament of Axel Heyst is even more disposed toward recalling, and reliving, the past than Almayer. Here, the device is marked by a classical simplicity ; Heyst just remembers his father, particularly the scene of his death. Though Conrad uses it with success also in Almayer's Folly, it exudes in this early work a tinge of sensationalism. For the author to feel justified in using Almayer's memory, he puts the character through a course of protracted observation, converted into a state of remembering only through imaginative transplantation in space and time.[3] One of the major expository passages in Victory is introduced by the simple statement that Heyst "remembered always his last evening with his father." (164) Then there is a flashback to this evening, followed by two passages of general narrative, with an interpolated scene of dialogue between Heyst and Wang.[4] During his meditation, Heyst is sitting among the "decaying bones of that once sanguine enterprise," the Tropical Belt Coal Coal Company ; (163) but there is this time no return to him after the exposi tion is over.

Still another means of exposition in Conrad is dialogue ; this can be shared one-directed. The Arrow of Gold is unique among Conrad's novels in this respect that the past history of the main female character is unveiled in a genuine dialogue.[5] Here Conrad uses a technique reminiscent of the analytic mehtod of Ibsen's drama. More commonly, he will use one-directed dialogue for this purpose, in which case one of the characters becomes a retrospective narrator. This happens, for instance, in a scene in Nostromo which to all appearance presents a real exchange of thoughts between Mr. and Mrs. Gould. They are "walking up and down the corridor" of their Casa, while Charles tells his wife about his father's ill luck with the mine. As in cases of unvoiced retrospection, Conrad allows the speaker to fade out after a while and gives the rest of the exposition in dramatic and summary form. Then there is a return to the Goulds, who are still walking "slowly up and down the corridor……" (90) At other times, Conrad uses passages of unalloyed dialogue-story ; the best examples one can find in Under Western Eyes, The Rover, and Victory. In Under Western Eyes. the Dame de Compagnie tells Miss Haldin the story of her life with the young lithographer, whose fate is a kind of miniature of Razumov's ; (149-55) in The Rover, old Catherine tells Peyrol of the days of terror, which still haunt the mind of Arlette,[6] and later Arlette eases herself of the load of the sanguine memories to l' Abbe ; (152-56) and in Victory, Ricardo tells Schomberg the story of his affiliation with Mr. Jones.[7]

The only difference between this situation and that in which the entire novel is told by a narrator lies in the fact that the general narrator is, at least in one of his roles, one step removed from the events in the story. Ricardo is telling his story to Schomberg, one of the important figures in the novels ; Marlow in Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim, and Chance epeaks to an audience which belongs to the frame rather than to the story itself. In such a narrative situation there exists, therefore, besides the small-scale multiple time seriee within the story, a large-scale parallelism between the time of the telling, the intermediate time of rooting out the facts, and finally the time of the main

action. This is not, however, the place for investigating the relatinoship between these various time elements.

Virginia Woolf's handling of exposition lacks the variety displayed by Conrad; also she lacks his sureness of touch, particularly in her early experimental work. Somewhat surprisingly, The Voyage Out contains most of the devices she used; the change which her fiction underwent after Night and Day was to a large extent stylistic. Only after she had developed a linguistic medium flexible enough to record the spontaneous mivements of consciousness could she transform the principle of retrospective exposition already used in Conrad and in her own The Voyage Out into a general method of narrative. This method is quite different from Conrad's retrospective method, which demands a narrator ; in Mrs. Woolf, the characters themselves tell the story, chiefly in the erlebte rede of internal monologue.

One should not, however, conclude that all of Mrs. Woolf's mature novels are of this kind. All of them, from Night and Day on, are experimental, but in different ways. Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, and The Waves are most purely psychological, both in technique and in thematic ideas. Orlando and The Years are fairly objective in method, and Between the Acts even more so. Naturally, the divergent stages of this development qualify the parts of a work as well as the whole. Between the Acts, for example, exhibits an entirely traditional tecchnique of exposition, more traditional, in fact, than in Mrs. Woolf's first novel. This statement does not, naturally, entail a value judgement ; the new expository devices developed by twentieth-century novelists are not absolutely superior to the traditional ones. They are superior only as used in a particular kind of novel.

Simple distributed expositon appɔars also elsewhere than in the first two novels and in Between the Acts. In Jacob's Room, the author makes elaborate attemps to disguise this method, with the deplorable result that the actual devices used are far more artificial than simple exposition would seem. In the first scene, Mrs. Flanders is on the beach writing a letter ; suddenly, in order to bring in a significant event from her past, Mrs. Woolf transplants her then and there to her garden. "Tears made all the dahlias in her garden undulate in red waves and flashed the glasshouse in her eyes, and spangled the kitchen with bright knives, and made Mrs. Jarvis..... think at church..... that marriag is a fortress..... Mrs. Flanders had been a widow for these two years." (5-6) Only in the omniscient author's mind can Mrs. Flanders, sitting on the beach, be in her garden as well. The negligence of temporal passage in traditional exposition is mild as compared to the abrupt displacement in time here effected. In later novels, disguises are dispensed with, even where most of the nouel is internal monologue. Mrs. Dalloway, for instance, contains a considerable amount of plain distributed exposition. Suffice it to comment on one major passage. The Smiths are on their way to Sir William Bradshaw, and Mrs. Woolf uses the time for exposition concerning Septimus. At first, he is described as seen by an anonymous observer ; (126-27) thereafter, except for a paragraph where a younger Septimus is viewed through the eyes of his boss, Mr. Brewer, (129-30) the point of view is the author's. At the end, however, as at the beginning, the exposition merges with the present action, as the Warren Smiths are shown approaching the house of Sir William. (142) Mrs. Woolf is here using a fairly close replica of Conrad's

technique in his first novel, Almayer's Folly, where about fifty pages of exposition are enclosed by looping. One other characteristic the passages also have in common. The expository material beccoms increasingly dramatic and specific, so that the merging with the fictional present is complete.[8]

Since Mrs. Woolf does not use a narrator, the only alternative to plain exposition is to exploit the knowledge and memory of her characters. This she does more intensively than, though not as extensively as, Conrad. She apparently does not care much for the more epic and dramatic ways of using memory. Hardly anyone of her characters would agree to be a good listener in a one-directed dialogue,[9] and bringing a shared past to the surface in genuine dialogue would, most probably, result in mere platitude.[10] Possibly, Mrs. Dalloway's conversation with Peter Walsh is an exception to this statement. (MD, 60-71) Nevertheless, it is the more lyrical and reflective types of retrospective exposition which Mrs. Woolf favors. This does not mean that the characters are inevitably self-centered. In fact, whereas in Conrad other people's opinions are collective, expressing themselves through rumor and legend, in Mrs. Woolf the individual characters are veritably addicted tothinking about others.[11] In this respect, she is closer to Henry James than to Conrad. In The Voyage Out, where the fictional space is successively the confines of a ship and a hotel, the characters operate not only as mutual observers, but as informants about each other's past.[12] Not unexpectedly, this device appears most frequently in Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lightouse, where one can distinguish fairly between retrospective exposition and creative or esthetic recollection. In an extended example from the latter work, Mrs. Ramsay, annoyed at Charles Tansley's remak, "There'll be no landing at the Lighthouse tomorrow," (15) recalls incidents from her past association with the scrawny student. The main purpose is evidently to characterize Mr. Tansley, whose remark is repeated with a variation at the end of the retrospective episode : " 'No going to the Lighthouse, James,' he said, as he stood by the window." (26) Thus, a looping is effected with with Mrs. Ramsay's point of departure. Where, as here, such indirect expsition proceeds from and pertains to major charracters, it is, of course, a means of portraying the informant as well as the subject of his thought.[13] In Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, the form of this type of exposition is usually erebte rede.

Exposition through self-reflectlon and personal memory occurs very naturally in Mrs. Woolf's fiction, most of the time without the support of any special device. There is, for example, no need for the subtle hints of an act of recall which Conrad makes, since the characters are fairly permanently lodged in the streams of memory. However, pervious to the time of her fully developed technique, Mrs. Woolf reveals a slight embarrassment at using this device. To disguise it, she has recourse to facetiousess. In The Voyage Out Mr. Pepper's self-exposition, which follows immediately upon his silent but critical examination of Helen Ambrose, is introduced in this manner : "He went on saying 'No' to her, on principle, for he never yielded to a woman on account of her sex. And here, dropping his eyes to his plate, he became autobiographical." (25) Mr, Pepper's "autobiography" is reported by the author rather than refracted through the character's temperament. More effective, naturally, is this type of exposition when the stylistic medium is erlebte rede. Again, Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse provide the best

examples.[14]

Two particular passages demand separate mention. I have stated that Conrad often uses sensory impressions as means of releasing the retrospective exposition. Mrs. Woolf does, of course, make use of such impressions, but more often as a general narrative stimulus which activates the stream of thought than as an expository device. In dealing with simultaneity in breadth, I mentioned Big Ben and various other objects having this as part of their function. Surprisingly, the most elaborate instance of retrospective exposition induced by a sensory impression appears in The Voyage Out. The impression, by the way, is not actual, but imaginary. Bored with Cowper's Letters, Rachel Vinrace, coming upon a sentence which said "something about the smell of broom in his garden,…… thereupon…… the little hall at Richmond laden with flowers on the day of her mother's funeral, smelling so strong that now any flower-scent brought back the richly horrible sensation……." (35) Then follows a flahback of a scene between Rachel and her aunts, after which she falls asleep. (37) In Mrs, Dalloway a long dassage of exposition about Peter Walsh, given in erlebte rede, is triggered by a phrase remembered from a dream Mr. Walsh has been having in Regent's Park. "He woke with extreme suddenness, saying to himself, 'The death of the soul.' … The words attached themselves to some scene, to some past he had been dreaming of." (88) Here this particular device is perfecfly chosen, because Peter Walsh deliberately shies away from recollection. (63) Only after making the feeling associated with the suppressed memories emerge into consciousness can Virginia Woolf make his past available to the reader. (88-97)

The question of how to manage exposition must have loomed large in Mrs. Woolf's mind from the beginning of her writing career. At least this is suggested by a diary entry for the year 1923. Here she admits that "it took a year's groping to discover what I call my tunnelling process, by which I tell the past by instalments, as I have need of it."[15] For a writer with three novels to her name, this sounds like an over-modest declaration. In its most obvious meaning, that Mrs. Woolf had not until then learned how to use distributed exposition, it is false. Such exposition abounds in her work from the beginning. One need mention only her use of parentheses for this purpose in Jacob's Room.[16] That, furthermore, with the example of Conrad before her—whose work she knew and admired—she should have remained practically ignorant of distributed exposition, is extremely unlikely. Yet, as she says in the same diary entry, "one cannot do this sort of thing consciously," despite Percy Lubbock's doctrine to the contrary.[17]

A more just interpretation of her declaration, however, would be that it covers her entire method of narrative, developed in order to express a peculiar vision of life and a unique conception of art. Relatively little of Mrs. Dalloway's recollection is exposition ; it is significant not so much for what it tells about her past as for what it reveals about such matters as the relation between the past and the present and between the passage of time and personal identity. Because in this novel time itself is a problem, its technical-literary deployment gathers thematic significance. Retrospective exposition is only one means, and not the most important, for bringing the past into the present ; in fact, the interweaving of perception and memory, of past and present, is generally so close that it becomes a general method of narrative.

References

1) Nostromo (N) 178-81. For an additional example of this kind of exposition, see SA (The Secret Agent) 84-86.

2) V (Victory) 176, 369

3) One should, however, be extremely careful in criticizing Conrad. Almayer is not Heyst. The former possesses a flamboyance of temperament with which Conrad's particular elaboration of the retrospective device is in full accord.

4) V, 164-71.—For less elaborate instances of retrospective exposition, see UWE (Under Western Eyes), 11-14 ; RO (The Rover), 6-8, 35-37, 131-34.

5) See The Arrow Gold (Garden City, N. Y. : Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924)

6) Ibid., 90-92.

7) V, 118-37.—For other instances of exposision by one-directed dialogue, see N, 70-71, 301-03 ; V, 143-44, 185-86 ; RO, 32-33.

8) For other examples of plain distributed exposition, see MD (Mrs. Dalloway), 150, 152, 155-56.

9) For an isolated example, see VO (The Voyage Out), 186-87.

10) Transcribed as erlebte rede, a short dialogue appears in an expository function in TL (To the Lighthouse), 109.

11) For scattered instances of collective opinion as a source of exposition. see MD, 160-61 ; BA (Between the Acts), 39-40, 58.

12) See VO, 24-25, 198, 322.

13) For examples, see MD, 110-12, 117-18 ; TL, 34-36, 45, 63-64, 75, 87-88.

14) See MD, 176, 187-88 ; TL, 17, 148.

15) Op. cit., 60.

16) Mrs. Woolf's use of this typographical device to set off expository material has been dealt with in the preceding chapter.

17) Ibid.